FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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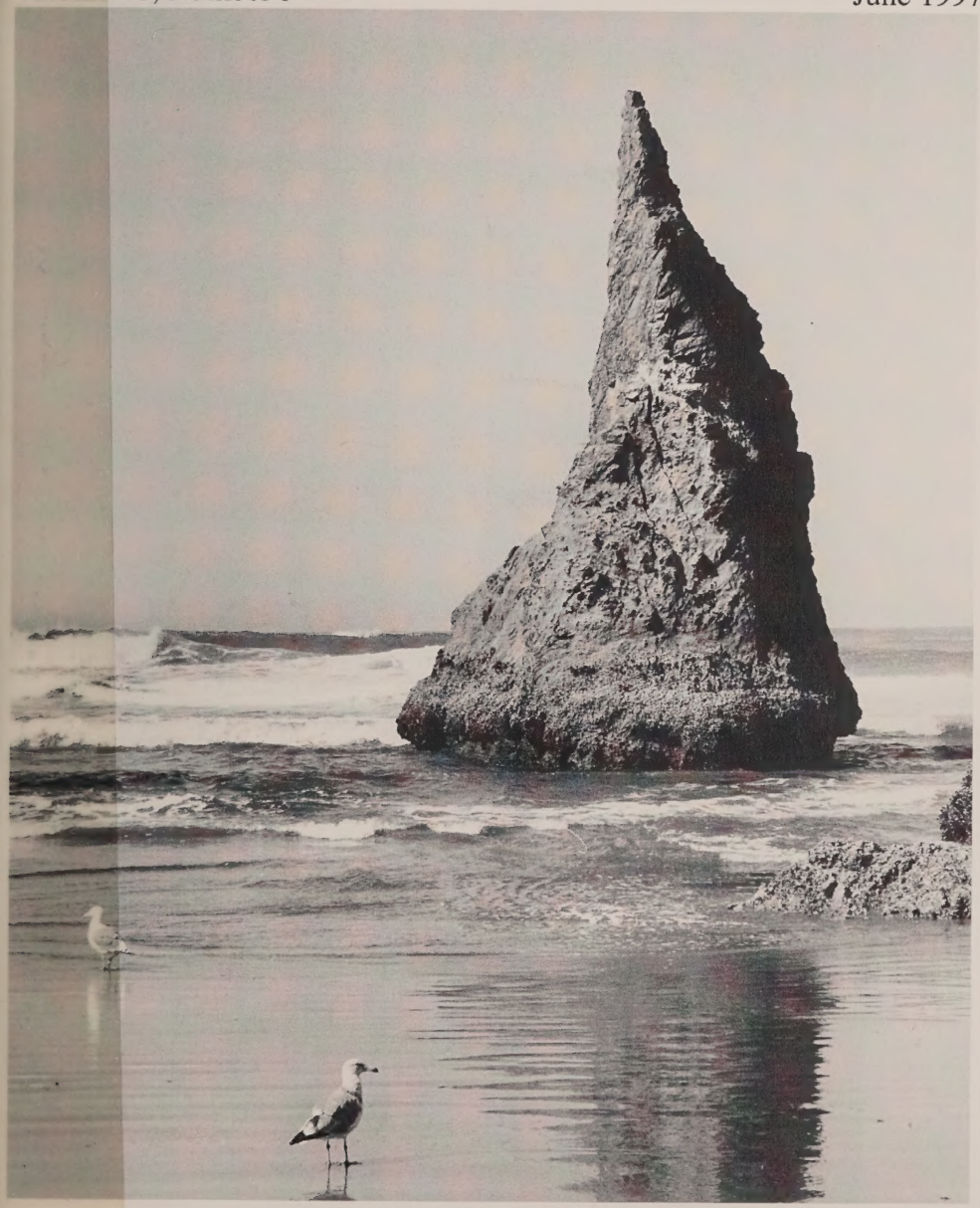

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is to encourage and support a spiritual orientation to life, to promote the practice of prayer, meditation, and service to others, and to help bring about a deeper spirit of unity among humankind.

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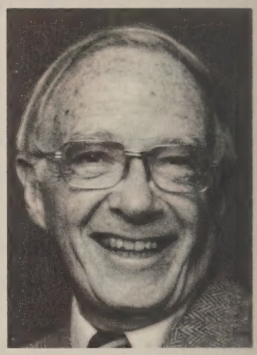
Cover photo by Robert F. Campbell--Face Rock Wayside on the Oregon coast.



All of us are on a sacred journey. Consciously or unconsciously, we know that. Otherwise we wouldn't be reading this journal. Because that's what Fellowship in Prayer is all about--the sacred journey to the divine source and center of our being.

Most of the time we forget our real journeys because we're so busy pursuing the ego-driven phantoms of "success" and "happiness"--however we define those words. Or rather, how our society and culture defines them for us. In our heart of hearts, however, we know that Henri Nouwen was right when he said, in our December issue: "I'm not what I do. I'm not what people say about me. I'm not what I have...my spiritual identity is not rooted in the things the world gives me. My life is rooted in my spiritual identity."

But our spiritual identities, our true selves, are hidden much of the time in black clouds of unknowing. At least mine is. The sacred journey winds through dark and dangerous places, as well as through bright sunny meadows. Tempting and seductive visions beckon us from the edge of the dark woods that border our paths. Many of them are hard to resist, especially since we have been trained and encouraged from childhood to pursue them. And that's all right as long as we don't make money and power and "getting ahead" and winning at all costs the gods we worship.

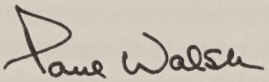
The sacred journey to real happiness involves giving up the clinging, the craving, the possessiveness, the attachment to the things of this world--not necessarily the things themselves.

Fortunately, there are many ways of staying connected with the ultimate reality to which the sacred journey is taking us. I have felt very connected, for example, watching dramatic sunsets off the coast at Big Sur, in California, or watching the sun rise over the vast Atlantic Ocean reaches from the rocky headlands of Monhegan Island, ten miles off the Maine coast. In prayer and meditation the constant turmoil of thoughts

and emotions lose their power over me and, in the best of times, I'm able to rest in the lap of a loving presence. The poetry of Mary Oliver can almost always bring me back to a soul-stirring awareness of the mystery and wonder of God in all things. Reading the Psalms or listening to the voice of Kiri Te Kanawa can reawaken the numb heart to the glory and ecstasy of the divine source. Remembering that there is that of God in everyone and helping a stranger or someone in need will help bring us back to our sacred journey.

These pages too, we hope, will bring you back to your true home by introducing you to the company of women and men who have experienced the divine presence in their lives and who can affirm and support you on the spiritual path you have chosen.

May your sacred journey be a joyous one!



Paul Walsh

Nearly twenty years ago--can it be? I readily but timidly stepped away from my family home toward the independence of college. There I tried on and discarded ideas, friends, and career possibilities as clothes in a constantly restocked closet. Would I be a journalist? a broadcaster? a missionary? a minister? For even then, as now, the call to words and to faith vied in me with equal force.

During that first year a beautiful and saucy literature teacher marked my first composition with red until it bled. Her brutal pen pushed me beyond wanting a good grade. She inherently asked questions: Who did I write for? What about those who would read them? She launched me on the way of words that lies beyond self-expression and into the quest for communication.

As I attended a religious liberal arts college, the eloquent chaplain spoke regularly of community--that we really did need and belong to each other; and the wellspring of his words brought him often to tears. That this wise man would stand before us--young mockers all, and weep, stirred me. Something other than our approval caused him to speak. He made me seek for something to say that touches the needy places we each hide inside.

These two, and many beloved others, taught me what I didn't seek. I had come to college wanting to learn the secret code that led to a successful life. For I was still child enough to believe that adults held the answers and lived without the great wonder of innocence and the sheer angst of youth. But these two showed me that the life that awaited me was not a test to be aced, nor a checklist to be marked off, but a journey to be lived.

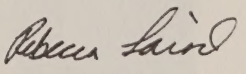
So I ventured forth from college still wishing for a checklist but knowing that taking it one step at a time was the best I could do. Within a year, I read a book by Frederick Buechner entitled, *The Sacred Journey*. In it he writes: "...God was addressing me out of my life as he addresses us all. And it is because I believe that, that I think of my life

and of the lives of everyone who has ever lived, or will ever live, as not just journeys through time but as sacred journeys."

Aha! Buechner enriched my spiritual vocabulary. This life I was stumbling through was a sacred journey; and profoundly, so were the lives of every other person with a beating, breaking heart.

Every month in this space, I share something from my own sacred journey with you and introduce the articles that I trust will pass along a variety of life-tested insights. In this month's interview, Mother Tessa Bielecki speaks of God as a "personal, passionate presence" that meets us as we simply practice "being present, passionately and personally to every given moment." Julia Anne Maus shows us a picture of the golden rule in action while Thomas A. Stella draws relational parallels between our love for God and love for one another. Musical prayers add dimension and efficacy for a prayer group led by Gary Severson. Sheryl Seyfert finds renewal in reconnecting with her Native American ancestral roots. And Rose Anthony Walshak takes up her questions and fears about mortality with Mary, mother of Jesus in "Meditation at Bear Mountain." After a long absence, "Books We've Enjoyed" returns with a review of *In Ordinary Time: Healing the Wounds of the Heart* by Roberta Bondi, and lastly, in Letters and Links, a new subscriber tells of how finding *Fellowship in Prayer* was "an answered prayer before I've even begun praying."

I know that you, our readers, are up to your necks in the details of your own sacred journeys. I pray that this issue contains a personal reminder that God is addressing you through your life. Are you listening?



Rebecca Laird

Mother Tessa Bielecki

Intimate Sharing With God: An Interview with Mother Tessa Bielecki

PAUL & ANNE WALSH

On a chilly Friday afternoon at the end of February, my wife, Anne, and I took the train to New York City for an enchanted weekend with Mother Tessa Bielecki, a vibrant, outgoing mystic who is co-founder and Abbess of three monastic communities--one in the mountain-desert of Colorado, one in the Nova Scotia woods, and one on the west coast of Ireland. Mother Tessa's most compelling characteristic strikes you immediately--her great zest for life. As you will see in the following interview, Mother Tessa, like her role model, St. Teresa of Avila, is passionately in love with Christ and the joyous life that such devotion makes possible.

If you would like to visit or make a retreat at the Spiritual Life Institute's monasteries, write to Nada Hermitage, Box 119, Crestone, CO 81131.

Paul Walsh: I think many people have rather limited notions about what prayer can be--and do. Could you speak about your understanding of prayer?

Mother Tessa: Prayer is such a broad, rich experience that it can't be limited to any one definition, but the one I learned first as a child still holds true for me and that is from St. John Damascene, who called prayer "a raising of the mind and heart to God." So whenever the mind and heart raises up, at any time, any place, in any circumstance, that can be prayer.

Another way of experiencing prayer comes from Fr. William MacNamara, who called prayer "a cry of the heart." In that sense, prayer can't be taught. It can't be programmed because it is absolutely spontaneous--the way the heart cries out. It cries out in laughter and tears. It cries out in joy and sorrow. It cries out in agony and turmoil.

PW: You make prayer sound like a very dramatic event!

Mother Tessa: It certainly can be. But on the other hand, St. Teresa called prayer "an intimate sharing with God." That way is also perfect and shows you why you can't program prayer and why you can't necessarily train somebody to do it. How do you train somebody to share intimately? That happens very spontaneously and very personally and individually. If we think of prayer only in very formal ways, we are missing out on this beautiful range of expression.

Another one of my favorite ways of learning how to pray is to study the Psalms. The Psalms are all cries of the heart, and next to my own existential efforts to pray, I learn more about praying from the Psalms than any other way. I would recommend to people that they take another look at the Psalms and pray just one a day. Since there are 150, by the end of five months they will have a very rich course in how to pray and how to pray spontaneously, and full of emotion. Whatever is in the heart, will cry out with whatever is there. So it doesn't matter what words we say. It doesn't matter what position we take with the body. It doesn't matter the time or the place. Prayer is just so incredibly vast as a human experience that, as we see in the Psalms, it can happen under any conceivable human situation.

PW: In fact, we don't have to say any words at all, do we?

Mother Tessa: Right. Too many people think that prayer means talking. Prayer means speaking. But prayer is also listening, and not necessarily listening to anything specific, but simply listening.

Because there is so much emphasis today on quiet prayer, the prayer of heightened awareness, I like to emphasize the other, more emotional,

full-ranged types of prayer, which is not to underrate or demean the silent kind of prayer which is ultimately the height of prayer.

Anne Walsh: How do you image God? Dr. Larry Dossey has written that one of the blocks to prayer is that so many people have been taught to pray to a wizened old white man. It gets in their way. I know one friend said that she always thought that the gaunt old minister up there at the church lectern was God.

Mother Tessa: Are you asking me personally here, or is this a general question?

AW: Both.

Mother Tessa: There are any number of ways to image God. One of the great difficulties in prayer is truncated emotion. I think this comes from a misapplication of contemplative wisdom from both the East and the West.

Too many people shut down their imagination in prayer and end up sitting in a vacuum. They are not sitting in the presence of God. They are not sitting in genuine contemplative stillness. They are simply in a vacuum because they have not used their imaginations enough.

I don't have a specific way to pray because my own prayer is so spontaneous. It is very much an intimate sharing and a cry of the heart. It would really depend on my existential situation. It is not as though I have a technique that I take to prayer.

I usually approach my prayer time by making some physical preparation for it. I like to go for a walk. I like to go for a swim. I like to do yoga or another kind of exercise to focus my body in some way to make a break from what I have been doing prior to prayer, which is usually some kind of mental effort. Then I quiet my mind by focusing it through reading.

A lot of people in the West forget or never knew that a very rich part of our Western heritage is a discipline called *lectio divina*, or using reading, not necessarily scriptural, although scripture is a very important

part of it, but some kind of reading that focuses the mind. So emptying the mind doesn't mean necessarily taking everything out of it, but focusing it. Poetry is very helpful, for example. Some people find science, a reading of science, an incredible springboard to prayer.

From my reading, I usually move into the Psalms, and from the Psalms I put everything away and then am simply there in the presence of God. It isn't that I'm trying to image God in any specific way, but God may present Himself to me in any number of ways. Most usually God comes to me as bridegroom and warrior.

Some people, growing numbers of people, image God as mother. Personally, I never do because my prayer is so Christ-oriented, even though one of the most wonderful ways that Christ ever presented himself was as a mother hen looking after her chicks. That is just not part of my own experience. But it is for many of the Christian mystics, and certainly for a growing number of people today.

AW: So God's image is a very personal image that each person must find within her or his own heart.

Mother Tessa: Yes, absolutely. And these images are really revelations from God about how to be in relation--we don't pay enough attention to them.

PW: But do you have a problem envisioning God in a feminine way?

Mother Tessa: I have no problem with that unless it is accompanied by a total rejection of imaging God in masculine ways. That may be a necessary stage for people who have been burned in some of way, but I never have been.

PW: Women often do have a different point of view then men. For example, Anne had an interesting insight last night. We were talking about the crucifixion, and why women often have a more joyful response to it than men do.

AW: Yes, we were talking about how Paul had difficulty with the pain and suffering and cruelty of the crucifixion, and I said that I thought perhaps women might have an easier time accepting it because of their experience with childbirth.

Mother Tessa: Exactly.

AW: Because when you're giving birth there's no place to go. You're in great pain, you're suffering, but to give birth to something desired, that's wonderful, that's miraculous!

Mother Tessa: Absolutely.

AW: Giving birth is one of the most amazing things. You are just "nailed" there. You have no choice about that. And you don't know if you are going to lose the child or if it is all right. There are so many unknowns.

Mother Tessa: I am fascinated by what you say. I find the crucifixion is so absolutely fundamental to human existence.

When I look at the crucifixion, when I look at the dying Jesus, I do not see death. I see death into life. And precisely because of the tension--the body is totally stretched to its limits--the cross is for me the most perfect image of limitlessness in its confinement. That's the mystery of it.

I remember once talking to James Lovelock, the man who designed the "Gaia Hypothesis." It was a fascinating exchange. I was telling him that many Westerners are all excited about the "Gaia Hypothesis" as though the truth that the earth is a living organism was something new. Christian mystics have always understood this because the earth is the body of Christ. So I would be seeing it in a more masculine way than the people who see Mother Earth as Gaia, because for me the earth is the body of Christ.

He used the expression: "the range of constraints." He was talking about the emergence of life forms and was saying that they come about,

Sangre de Cristo Chapel, Spiritual Life Institute, Crestone, CO.

not out of limitless capacities but out of what he calls "the range of constraints." This has absolutely changed my life and I think of this all the time. It is not even a conscious thing. It has so totally taken over my unconscious because my life is full of so many constraints, and instead of feeling trapped, I don't. I feel life burgeoning all over the place.

For example, for years in our community all of the food that we got was given to us for free, so that when you went to prepare a meal, you didn't have unlimited possibilities. You had to use what was there, and the creativity was always astounding.

People think of celibacy as a constraint. I see it as this incredible open door that brings limitless possibilities, and I see the same thing in the crucifixion, that what seems to be confinement and constraint is actually, in a paradoxical way, a limitless possibility. For example, the arms are stretching to limitless infinity. And that's how I see pain or suffering. It breaks us open to infinity.

For me, the image of the crucifixion is completely positive.

PW: Experiencing constraints and suffering as joyful mysteries is a big part of Christian spirituality, isn't it?

Mother Tessa: Yes, and another example of that is the fabulous devotion in Christianity, in Roman Catholicism, to our Mother of Sorrows, that Marian figure at the foot of the cross. In my own community, when we make our vows, we take a name. The first name I took was Tessa of the Incarnation because that's the mystery that fascinates me the most. God wedded himself to matter and therefore all of matter, everything incarnate, is filled with the mystery of God. My whole life is about penetrating the depths of matter. And then, as I grew older and my life became more difficult, and there was more and more suffering, I became increasingly aware, not only of the image of Christ as the one who suffers, but of the woman watching his suffering, which is an even worse crucifixion because it is easier to suffer pain yourself than to watch the ones you love undergo it, because if you really love, in an instant you would take all the suffering on yourself in order to spare the other. The agony of the woman at the foot of the cross is a powerful image of that devotion.

AW: And not just for Christians. Recently a friend's son, a young man with AIDS, took his own life. His mother, who is Jewish, said that what had helped her get through that trauma was the image of Mary.

Mother Tessa: Really?

AW: Yes.

Mother Tessa: When a Jew uses Christian imagery, it can be tremendously powerful. Chagall, for example, used the image of Jesus on the cross, draped in a prayer shawl, to express the persecution of the Jews throughout history.

PW: Does it matter whether you crucify yourself or whether it is done to you?

Mother Tessa: Not really, in the sense that I think all suffering is ultimately redemptive. In other words, it is ultimately transformational, not only for the person who undergoes it, but for the world, because no one suffers alone and no one is transformed alone. A lot of people ask questions about why evil or why suffering, but I have never asked those questions myself. I have always been interested in the "how to" questions, not the "why" questions. To me, suffering has always been a given in life. Suffering is. Therefore the question becomes how to cope creatively with it. I have had a lot of trouble with people who say there is no evil, there is no suffering. I become enraged when people say that. Enraged.

Recently though, I made some progress with somebody who was saying this. We came to a real point of understanding. When he said there is no suffering or evil except what you create for yourself, he was referring to the stupid stuff that we do to ourselves, such as ego displays, like I've got to look good and I don't look good, so I have to go through all these conniptions to make myself look good. But when he was saying "you cause your own suffering," I was thinking concentration camps, and I was enraged. Don't tell me that those Jews did it to themselves. They did not. So it was a very helpful dialogue because I could understand what people like him mean when they say all suffering is self-imposed. They are not thinking about concentration camps like I am.

I have visited Auschwitz, and how I pray now affects the suffering that took place in the late thirties and the early forties in the concentration camps. I feel very linked up with that kind of suffering as I pray. There is no separation between what I do now in the 1990's and how people suffered in the 1940's in World War II. For me, that is a pivotal experience in my whole life. I was born in 1944, but the deaths and the concentration camps are, for me, a whole part of my *kairos* experience of prayer, because prayer happens in *kairos*, which is time out of time.

PW: There is simply no question that prayer is effective over time and over space, as Dr. Larry Dossey has demonstrated time and again.

Mother Tessa: Yes, it is very interesting to see how scientists now are doing these experiments that show that prayer works, that prayer has an effect. Yet those of us who live by faith know it on another level. What we want to say is, "Well, it is about time you caught up. Mystics have experienced God directly for centuries!"

PW: That's true not only of mystics. I find that increasing numbers of men and women who don't belong to a church, many of them very successful and well-to-do, feel something important is missing in their lives, and they sense that it has something to do with God, with the Spirit, with the Divine Presence.

My question is, "How can these people come into personal contact with God?" Is this a question of grace, or are there things they can do?

Mother Tessa: I think my favorite way to describe who God is, is also my favorite way to describe what our response to God might be: Personal, passionate presence. That's a term coined by Father William MacNamara, my own spiritual father and spiritual guide. God is personal, passionate presence. That description helps people who have trouble with religious images in churches, or people who have trouble with gender issues. They can simply begin with a sense of presence. Let's say we are unchurched. We know nothing. We don't know what to do. The best thing we can do is simply to practice being present, passionately and personally, to every given moment. In that practice we discover, or it is revealed to us or unfolds in us, the personal, passionate presence of God.

PW: How do you become passionate if you're not?

Mother Tessa: I don't know much about not being passionate. Again,

it is one of those inconceivable things to me. But of course, we don't all have to be Zorba the Greek.

Passion takes many different shapes. It doesn't have to be bombastic. It doesn't have to be my kind, which is very effusive, which can't contain itself. Passion can burn quietly. I don't know a whole lot about that. You know, one of the greatest bits of guidance I ever got from Fr. William was, "Why don't you try to be more Buddhist?" And I said, "Oh, I'm just so afraid of going too quiet or numb." He said, "I don't think you have to worry."

But certainly there is a way of being passionate that is real and true and quieter. Of course, some people are simply frozen, or do not feel, because of some psychological impediment. In those cases I think that people need to do some psychological work, because they are not free enough to feel passion and express their passion. I know many people like this. Or, it may come from a repressive background or it may come from a misinterpretation of dimensions of contemplation in the Christian tradition, which makes them think that it means never being full of life and joy. The result is we see a lot of truncated human beings who think they are being ascetic or contemplative, but who have simply shut down dimensions of their beings that never should have been shut down in the first place. They need some kind of therapeutic work to unleash the passion that is buried in them.

AW: Yes, I'm a Jungian psychoanalyst, and I often see patients using spiritual or religious practices as a defense against fully experiencing life.

PW: I'm afraid we're running out of time, but I do want to ask you about the box and the sword.

Mother Tessa: That's hard to talk about. What you need to do is actually experience those objects. What happened was that we made a sword for an ordination present for our most recently ordained priest. It was a marvelous experience to do this as a community. We just had a bar of steel and we made a sword. If you looked at it you couldn't

Mother Tessa

believe that this little bunch of hermits made it using a vacuum cleaner as a blast furnace.

It's an incredible story, and we did it when we had no time to do it. So it is also an image for us of the fact that there is always room for poetry. It's a parable about what making room for poetry does to your life.

The box also came at the same time. I love boxes. And the idea was to make boxes out of the yellow birch wood from our own trees in Nova Scotia. They were going to be filled with things of meaning that came up during a long period of retreat when our community was all together. I was going to start things off by giving everybody something. Then the box became a very Buddhist thing for me: The box had to be empty. It was very funny, because I'm known for giving the community presents, and so practically everybody was just expecting that they were going to open it and find presents--but of course, it was empty. And then I asked them, "Well, is the box empty or full?"

PW: That sounds like the ultimate question.

Mother Tessa: Yes, exactly. That's what symbols are all about. The sword, for example, is never casually used. Every time we use it, it's transformational. It is very sacred. We do these wonderful liturgies with it where it is held in certain ways and it is just not a casual thing. It's really very profound.

PW: One more quick question. How can people go to your community?

Mother Tessa: All of our communities are open for retreats. They are open monasteries, which makes them very different. There is a very rich dance that goes on between us as monks and hermits and those who come on our retreats. We are very enriched by them, and they are very enriched by having real access to us. People can just write to us at our Colorado monastery.

And we've just begun a monastery in Ireland, which is still a construction site. So unless you want to help with manual labor, don't ask about Ireland because we are just going to put a hammer in your hand and put you to work. And when you think Nova Scotia, don't forget about the dead of winter, because my most favorite time in Nova Scotia is January and February when it is bitter cold. Most people might think that it is very bleak, but the solitude and silence of the snow laden

Nova Nada in the dead of January or February, with your wood stove crackling and the full moon shining on the lake is incomparable.

PW: Thank you for sharing your spiritual vision and practice with us. It has been a very moving experience. □

Robert Campbell

Mitakuye Oyasin

SHERYL SEYFERT

This writer grew up in a family that traced its lineage in this country to 1633. She found a refreshing surprise in the discovery that her paternal great-grandmother went even further back; she was Cherokee. The title, Mitakuye Oyasin means "all my relations" in Sioux.

My husband and I had come late to the powwow in the small dusty field, sandwiched between housing developments and an industrial park. It was twilight, that time of day when the dim scattered light makes the world seem fragile and elusive. Most of the tourists had gone home. The vendors were closing up their booths, laying beaded headbands and feather earrings carefully into boxes. Only a few of the dancers were still in full regalia; the bells on their ankles and snuff-can lids sewn into their dresses jingled as they walked, sipping sodas, talking softly, flickering flames of color moving beyond the circle of booths. Melting into the dusk.

Reunited after a two-year separation, my husband and I wandered aimlessly, fingering what few items remained--elk teeth, dream catchers, totems. I was anxious and unsure about our reconciliation. Would one of us say or do the wrong thing? Would we slip back into old behavior? Would we be able to rekindle the love we'd once shared?

Sheryl Seyfert is a former newspaper reporter and columnist, magazine editor, and freelance writer who is completing her first novel.

Halfway around the field we heard the throbbing of a drum. Following it, we moved past the remaining booths, gathering sounds like bread crumbs: the trilling of birds, the deep-throated gurgling of a stream, the rustling and pattering of leaves, wolves--wolves!--howling.

Slipping behind the booths we found ourselves in a ramshackle village of campers, tents, and pickup trucks on the edge of the industrial park. Children squatted in the sparse dry grass, playing quietly with sticks and clothespins while women hovered over cook-stoves. The air was thick with a fragrant sugary aroma and a hazy blue smoke.

And the sounds of a forest, ancient and deep.

We hesitated, fearing ourselves intruders. Then, tugged by the savage wonderful music, we shyly wound our way through the makeshift village.

Janet Gnall

And there it was--not a forest but a camp circle, round as the Sacred Hoop of the universe. It was drawn in the dust with the swaying bodies of men, long-haired and dark-eyed, and anchored with the melodies of plumed whistles, gourd rattles, flutes, and drums. And the chanting of brave heart songs.

As we watched quietly from a distance, an old man, thin as a knife and with a mane of snow white hair, waved a bony hand at us, beckoning us closer.

We smiled self-consciously, embarrassed, shaking our heads. No, thank you. No, really.

The old man held up a hand and a hush as silent as a winter's dawn fell over the circle. He spoke softly to the others. Heads turned in our direction. Toothy grins flashed. "Come join us," the voices encouraged. The circle broke, reformed, made space for us.

Starting songs, midnight songs, morning songs. Different tongues: Pequod, Abnaki, Lakota, Sioux, Micmac, Coyotero, Ojibwa. The words were a web of mystery, torn from the depths of swollen hearts, my own included.

Aaa, aaa, ya man, a-ya-ma, a-ya-ma.

We chanted until the sky was littered with stars, and the moon, a luminous arc, hung from the gate of heaven.

Aaa, aaa, ya man, a-ya-ma, a-ya-ma.

After we said our good-byes, my husband and I walked back to our car hand-in-hand, smiling wordless, our souls united in a way I had never felt before.

It has taken me five years to understand what happened that night, to recognize the magic that tore me away from myself and emptied me out, and in so doing set me on a journey to love.

In that circle, I was like breath, as individual as a current of air, a sliver of Hermetic Axiom's God, ". . . a sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."

"You have spent the first half of your life becoming somebody," Ram Dass has written. "Now you can work on becoming nobody, which

Robert F. Campbell

is really somebody. For when you become nobody there is no tension, no pretense, no one trying to be anyone or anything. The natural state of the mind shines through unobstructed--and the natural state of the mind is pure love."

Steven Foster and Meredith Little, in their book *Vision Quest*, recommend that we consecrate our circle with prayers, offerings, or songs, "remembering to thank the forces represented by your power place for allowing you to make your 'last stand' here."

And so I do.

Mitakuye Oyasin

Ohe, Whee-me-me-ow-ah,
Sweet Medicine-Kokomaht-Jazus-Great Mystery,
I fall on my knees in gratitude
that my breath is no more than a spider's
nor less than a mountain's;
that I am one in the Sacred Hoop;
as wondrous as gopher dust,
as powerful as a pebble,
a strand in a braid of sweet grass with
All my relations.

Mitakuye Oyasin *is Sioux for "all my relations"--which includes all human beings and every plant and animal, even things such as rocks, which the Sioux believe have life and a soul. All Sioux ceremonies end with the words* "mitakuye oyasin."

"Whee-me-me-ow-ah" is Yakima for "Great Chief Above."
"Sweet Medicine" is Sioux for "Christ."
"Kokomaht" is Yuma for "Creator."
"Jazus" is Lakota for "Jesus."
"Great Mystery" is Ojibwa for "Creator."

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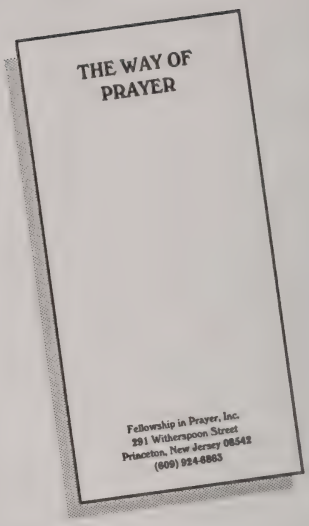

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What would you like to tell us about your spiritual needs, desires, experiences? About *Fellowship in Prayer*? Use the space below!

What Love Can Do

JULIA ANNE MAUS, F.S.P.A.

During a home visit, a parish minister sees the golden rule of love in action: Do for others what you wish somebody would do to you if you were in their place.

To accept one's situation in life and become creative in dealing with it is a sign of mental health," said the priest-psychologist, who was the instructor for a college course in Psychology and Religion I took one summer.

The following year while engaged in parish ministry I met a couple who impressed me by the way they were doing what the instructor had said.

The wife, in her early fifties, was in the advanced stages of multiple sclerosis. When I was told that she spends many hours alone, I took the Eucharist to her and visited with her several times. The first time I found her in a wheelchair in a sunny dinette working crossword puzzles from a book lying flat on the table. "My husband always cuts the backs off the books for me and then puts them together with loose-leaf notebook rings," she told me. "In that way the books can lie flat on the table, because I can't hold the book and turn pages. If he puts the pencil in my hand, I can write the letters."

When asked whether she wasn't afraid or lonely, she explained that she could watch TV by pushing her remote control button or call for help by pushing her button control telephone. Pushing buttons was the extent of her physical ability.

Sister Julia Anne Maus, F.S.P.A. was a classroom teacher and parish minister for more than forty years. Now retired to Wisconsin, she has more time for writing, tutoring, and leading retreats.

I was amazed to see how utterly contented and happy she seemed, and continued the conversation with a remark about her rose-filled wallpaper and matching pink organdy curtains. "Oh, my husband did the wallpapering. He brought home some samples for me to make a selection, but he did the work all himself. He's good at that. In fact there are so many things he can do. He's an engineer with one of the auto construction companies, you know."

I didn't know that, and merely remarked something about his being a good engineer in many ways.

"Oh yes," she continued. "There are so many things he can do, and besides that, he has a Ph.D. in psychology. He's a very smart man." She beamed while telling me about her husband. I soon discovered that he was the secret of her happiness.

"And did your husband find those lovely curtains, too?" I asked. "They are certainly a perfect match."

> "I merely do what I would want somebody to do for me, if I were in her place," he commented rather casually, then called to his wife in the other room, "Did you order steak for dinner?"

"Oh no, I did that myself. My husband carried me and my wheelchair to his car and took me to Hudson's. There his sister met us at the store, and wheeled me to the curtain department. When I saw those curtains, I knew they were what we wanted. Then we did some more shopping and when we were finished, we called my husband, and he came to get me again."

She was so happy with herself and her husband, I couldn't help wondering how many people in perfect health have a better outlook on life.

"My husband also made a bed for me in his car so I can lie down when we go on long trips."

"How far do you drive?" I asked.

"Oh, we drive to New York every summer, to see the grandchildren. It's almost a full day's trip, but I enjoy seeing the grandchildren so it's worth it," she replied.

I marveled, and as if enjoying my amazement, she remarked, "And last winter, we spent his vacation in Jamaica. That was beautiful," she added.

"Not Jamaica?" I said in astonishment.

"Oh yes! My husband carried me to the plane and then went back to get my wheel-chair. He wouldn't let anybody else carry it for fear they might dislocate some of the tubing he has put in for my comfort." I was speechless, but she went on. "In Jamaica, we spent many days just sitting on the beach, enjoying the sunshine. That was so good for him." Then she added, "He works so hard."

"I bet he thinks it was good for you, too," I remarked.

She just continued with her story, "In the evenings he would dress me in a beautiful evening gown he had bought for me, and we would go to a nice place for dinner."

"What a man!" I thought to myself. Here is this woman who can't even feed herself, but he gives her the joy of being in a nice location with well-dressed people, even though he has to feed her."

It was time for me to leave so I told her I would come back, and that I hoped to meet her husband, too, some day.

When, after a couple of weeks, I finally did meet him, I remarked that he was surely doing a wonderful job in making his wife so happy and so proud of him.

"I merely do what I would want somebody to do for me, if I were in her place," he commented rather casually, then called to his wife in the other room, "Did you order steak for dinner?"

"Yes," she answered, "It's in the refrigerator."

He looked and turned to me saying softly, "I insist that she orders groceries for us, and scold her if she forgets. I could do it in a fraction of the time it takes her, but she needs to be needed."

"A good psychologist, as well as engineer, and a wonderful husband!" I reflected on my way home that day.

That man's realization that every person needs to be needed by someone to be fulfilled and happy surely shows that he is an excellent psychologist who puts his knowledge into practice. I'm sure he was right in saying that he could have ordered those groceries in less time than it took to get his wife to do it. But again, there's where his love and concern for her welfare showed, even though she may not have realized it. But that's what made it even more unselfish, more beautiful.

I should have thought of that years ago when my elderly mother lived in an apartment with me and wanted to have something ready when I came home for lunch. Thinking only of her arthritis, I insisted that she just wait and let me warm up some leftovers, which I said would take just a few minutes. Today I realize that it might have been easier on her arthritis to surprise me with some goodies she knew I liked than to just sit and wait with more time to think of her pains.

The fact that this man did not think of himself as doing anything exceptional really impressed me. "I do only what I wish somebody would do for me if I were in her place." Wouldn't it be wonderful if more people could say that! □

Service is the rent each of us pays for living--the very purpose of life.

Marian Wright Edelman

One day the teacher, Frederick Wilkerson, asked me to read to him. I was twenty-four, very erudite, very worldly. He asked that I read from *Lessons in Truth,* a section which ended with these words: "God loves me." I read the piece and closed the book, and the teacher said, "Read it again." I pointedly opened the book, and I sarcastically read, "God loves me." He said, "Again." After about the seventh repetition I began to sense that there might be truth in the statement, that there was a possibility that God really did love me. Me, Maya Angelou. I suddenly began to cry at the grandness of it all. I knew that if God loved me, then I could do wonderful things, I could try great things, learn anything. For what could stand against me with God, since one person, any person with God, constitutes the majority?

Maya Angelou; Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now

A man lamented to his rabbi:

"I'm frustrated that my work leaves me no time for study or prayer."

The rabbi replied: "Perhaps your work is more pleasing to God than study or prayer."

Hasidic tale retold by Jeffrey K. Salkin in Being God's Partner

Prayer as Relationship

THOMAS A. STELLA, C.S.C.

Likening prayer to on-going communication in an intimate relationship, Thomas Stella reminds us that prayer "is at the same time, no big deal and the only deal there is." He suggests that all of life is lived in relationship to God, not just in the quiet interior moments when we are conscious of God's presence.

I'm sitting at the dining room table in my friend Ann's Chicago apartment where, just a few minutes ago, we had a conversation about her relationship with Jim. Theirs is a friendship that appears to be moving toward marriage. She spoke of the leisurely weekend times when they would do nothing of note, sometimes together, sometimes apart. What they did or didn't do, said or didn't say, all spun around the common center of love that connected them. But it was mostly a matter of just living their lives. It was an easy unfolding, a dance of closeness and distance.

As Ann spoke I was struck by the awareness that what she was describing was a metaphor for prayer or, better yet, for living prayerfully. We are used to thinking of prayer as intentional time with God, a time of intense concentration wherein we either sit in stillness not clinging to any thoughts or feelings (contemplative prayer), or a more conscious articulation, in thoughts or words, of our need, gratitude, or praise. Though there is immense value in these forms of prayer I be-

Tom Stella is a Holy Cross priest living in Colorado Springs. His main ministry is spiritual development which he exercises in both church and secular settings.

lieve that real prayer is, at heart, a relationship. It is the living of our everyday lives in communion with the "ground of being," the ever present "Other" with whom we are one, the center around which our lives turn, the Mystery that is given form in and through our person.

For Ann and Jim there has been a growing trust in the significance each has in the life of the other--this has formed the ground, the foundation that allows them the freedom to just live, to be with each other and apart, to go about the tasks at hand, to respond to the demands of the day wherever that takes each of them separately or together.

There is, for all of us, a relationship that is as real as that of any two people in love. There is a reality at the center of life around which our days unfold and from which we are never parted. All of our comings and goings, ordinary as they may be, are lived in relationship to this reality which is as intimate as it is infinite.

I believe that real prayer is, at heart, a relationship. It is the living of our everyday lives in communion with the "ground of being."

It takes a great deal of trust to just live. It can be hard to take our hands off a relationship, to let it unfold, to simply be ourselves, and to pursue the tasks of daily living without undue concern as to whether what we do or how we do it is affecting the other. But this is precisely what a prayerful life is about. When St. Paul challenges us to pray without ceasing (1Thess. 5.17) he does not mean that we should speak or think about God all our waking hours. Rather he is referring to a way of living that flows from the surrender of our hearts. It is being who we are in relation to who God is. It is, at the same time, no big deal and the only deal there is. We are always in prayer, always in communion,

always living, moving, and having our being in God (Acts 17.28). In prayer, as in human relationships, there is the possibility of taking God for granted--hence the need for intentional togetherness--but the good news is that even when we forget, could care less, are angry at, or in other ways feel estranged from God, we still remain in God.

A relationship is on shaky ground if either party is reluctant to trust the other. In such a case communication will be tentative at best. If, in our intentional times of prayer, we are not convinced of the permanence of God's love for us our prayer is likely to be awkward and self-conscious. It will feel like something we should do rather than a natural expression of and appreciation for a life-giving bond. It will not be a matter of great concern if we are distracted when at prayer if we know in our hearts that "nothing can separate us from the love of God" (Rom. 8.39). But if this truth is not internalized we may fall prey to the tendency to measure the quality of our prayer--a practice that will only lead to discouragement.

In any healthy relationship each person is given, and feels, a freedom that allows them to just live and to just be who they are. There is, of course, the invitation to become more whole, to move toward maturity on all levels, while swathed in acceptance for who he or she is right now. There is such a freedom in relation to God. We are called to trust in the communion with God that has given birth to and sustains us. We can be present to the moment, the people, and the tasks at hand, confident that all we do is somehow a dimension of who we are in God. The relationship is intact even when we are not thinking about, or attending to it.

After thirty-three years in religious life and twenty-four years of priesthood I still struggle to live in the freedom I have described above. It is a testimony to the power of sin that what is so true and life-giving is still so difficult. I know in my head the truth of which I write, but I continually revert to a self-conscious, hands-on way of living and praying. When I am just living I feel I should pray more. When I pray I often feel divorced from life.

But where sin abounds grace does more abound (Rom. 5.20). The truth that life and prayer are one continues to haunt me. The awareness

that everyday, ordinary living is sacred ground works on me like drops of water on a rock. Divinity and humanity, heaven and earth, religion and relationship are the Yin and Yang of life, the sides of the one coin that is the Mystery we embody, the Spirit whose life is our life and with whom we are always in relationship. □

Robert F. Campbell

Morning Prayer

Good morning, God.
Thank you for another day.
Help me to affirm
    The world as it is,
    The people as they are,
    And myself as I am.
And from Thy bounty
Gather another day of Grace.

John Fisher

Morning Hymn

O our mother the earth, O our father the sky,
Your children are we, and with tired backs
We bring you gifts that you love.
Then weave for us a garment of brightness;
May the warp be the white light of morning,
May the weft be the red light of evening,
May the fringes be the falling rain,
May the border be the standing rainbow.
Weave for us this garment of brightness
That we may walk fittingly where grass is green,
O our mother the earth, O our father the sky!

Tewa Pueblo prayer

John Fisher is a pilgrim, a retired teacher, a painter, a Quaker, a friend of Fellowship in Prayer, living in southeastern Pennsylvania all of his eighty-one years.

Morning Hymn, Let Me Pass the Day in Peace *and* Daily Prayer *are from* The Gift of Prayer: A Treasury of Prayers from the World's Spiritual Traditions, *a Fellowship in Prayer book. Available at your bookstores or through Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542.*

Robert F. Campbell

Let Me Pass the Day in Peace

O God, you have let me pass the night in peace,
Let me pass the day in peace.
Upon my way which you made peaceable for me,
O God, lead my steps.
When I have spoken,
Keep falsehood away from me.
When I am hungry,
Keep me from murmuring.
When I am satisfied,
Keep me from pride.
Calling upon you, I pass the day,
O Lord who has no Lord.

Boran people of Kenya

Daily Prayer

In the evening, and morning, and noonday,
we praise you, we bless you, we thank you,
and we pray to you, Master of all,
to direct our prayer
as incense before you;
And let not our hearts turn away
to words or thoughts of wickedness,
but rescue us from all things that hunt our souls.
For to you, Lord, Lord, our eyes look up,
and our hope is in you.

Vespers of the Eastern Church

Musical Prayers

GARY SEVERSON

Adding music to one's repertoire of ways to pray can prove liberating, as this author discovered.

A few years back my wife and I decided to incorporate music into a prayer meeting we led at church. We had discovered in our private prayers at home that music could free spontaneous prayer and worship. It seemed to act like a catalyst in helping us step out from the familiar and toward the Lord.

In our meeting we practiced ministering to the Lord with an accompanying piano (and a flute for two years). Our personal prayer needs were added to the end of the prayer time or not included at all. Our dominant principle was that as we ministered to God, our Lord would minister to us and our needs would be addressed. Besides, there were other prayer meetings that specifically focused on peoples' needs.

Amazing results occurred. The most prominent was that a second harmonizing flute began playing regularly at our meeting. Everyone heard it, but no one could pinpoint the unseen source. Twice we saw "shapes" (whom we thought were angels) watching our meeting. But

Gary Severson resides in Nooksack, WA with his wife, Marlene, and teenage son, Jamie. The Seversons attend Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Bellingham, WA, where they are active in prayer and music. Gary has been published in Liberty, Christian Parenting Today, Village Voice, Sunday Digest, *and other publications.*

mostly what happened was that we left the meeting with our spirits rejuvenated by the Holy Spirit. In fact, when we attended a church service afterwards, we seemed to hold a greater love for each of the people, and were able to seek God more purely than before.

Musical prayers are not a new concept. The most common Hebrew word for prayer--"tephillah"--can mean a prayer set to music. This is the word used in Isaiah 56.7b--". . . for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." Many of the Psalms were prayers that could be set to music (e.g. those written by David). In the New Testament we find passages such as Eph. 5.19 and Col. 3.16 that admonish us to worship the Lord and speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. These are sung prayers, and could even include songs that use no words (e.g. "La-la-la").

I believe God honors those who replace their safe Christianity with daring faith.

Because prayers are sung with music does not make them more effective than other prayers. But in our years of practicing musical prayers my wife and I stumbled upon a principle that does make prayers effective. Let me illustrate the principle using the Old Testament first.

In 2 Chronicles 6.13-42 we find Solomon kneeling before God and offering supplication that honored God. Then II Chronicles states, "When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple."

God was pleased with the offerings and sacrifices and the prayer. The principle demonstrated is *acceptable sacrifices bring a divine response that in turn focuses all attention on God.* (1 Kings 18.16-39 is another Old Testament example.)

In the New Testament the principle is expressed in Acts 16.25-30. In verse 25 we see Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns to God. It appears they had been doing so for some time, for they probably did not begin at midnight. Also, they were praying and singing loud enough for the other prisoners to hear them; they were not intimidated by the other prisoners nor were they afraid of having their voices heard. Their prayers and songs were an acceptable sacrifice, for in verse 26 we read, "Suddenly, there was such a violent earthquake, that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prisons doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose." Certainly that was a divine response! (In each of the above examples, notice how quickly God's response occurred.) I believe God honors those who replace their safe Christianity with daring faith. In verses 29-30, "The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out of their cells and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'" In other words, his attention was focused on the purposes of God. He knew something was being asked of him.

Acceptable sacrifices are new each time we meet with God, for they always cost us in terms of reputation, time, or resources. They may not make us look good in the eyes of others; they are seldom convenient. Our acceptable sacrifices are spiritual sacrifices. A partial list includes praise, song, adoration, and thanksgiving to the Lord, and an attitude of sharing with others. They are expressions from the deepest realms of our being, where what really matters to us exists. Since we are uniquely formed by God and have our own walk with God, what constitutes an acceptable sacrifice for one person should not be exactly like that of someone else. However, they will be the same in that God is always the focal point.

My wife and I found that through the forum of musical prayers we could release acceptable sacrifices to God. Besides being strengthened, edified and encouraged in our faith, we believe the following was accomplished, too:

1. We were participating in spiritual warfare. Psalm 149.6-9 indicates that praise coupled with a double-edged sword (the

Robert F. Campbell

scriptures) battles our spiritual enemy. In the example of Paul and Silas, their singing and praying literally resulted in the prisoners being set free.

2. Ephesians 6.18 occurs at the end of the description of putting on the full armor of God. As if stating a summarizing principle, Paul says, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." Part of "all kinds of" are musical prayers. Furthermore, this passage affirms the necessity and value of prayer.

3. In I Samuel 16.23 David played his harp and the evil spirit in King Saul was driven away. Our own praise and prayer can be expected to result in a similar response from God.

As I suggested previously, musical prayers can consist only of music, without accompanying words. After all, prayer is communion with God, and words are not the only way we communicate.

On one occasion, two musicians on the worship team at our church were tuning their guitars to the piano for pre-service practice. As the two began to play a simple melody to hear how they sounded, they started repeating the melody and offering it as a sacrifice of worship to God. They played that basic melody with only slight variations for over an hour. Our prayer group joined them somewhere near the middle of that time. When we walked into the sanctuary we sensed a holy atmosphere. Instantly we knew the moment called for quiet reverence, so we sat on chairs and the floor with our hands raised, basking in the presence of the Lord.

God enjoys variety in our prayer lives. Singing prayers and playing musical instruments is a liberating way to seek the Lord. Let's give it a try. □

Meditation at Bear Mountain

ROSE ANTHONY WALSHAK

Did Mary, mother of Jesus, puzzle over death? This author turns her own questions into a prayerful meditation on mortality.

Mary, dear blessed lady, may I imagine you, seated opposite me at this picnic table, here beside Hessian Lake, where the gorgeous leaves are reflected in the still water, and the air is pleasantly cool. I lovingly (and maybe a bit hesitantly) ask you to take off all the golden, jeweled crowns and halos that artists depict you with, and even the veil that middle-eastern women do wear even today. I like to think of you wearing your soft brown hair, parted in the middle, and hanging down your back in a thick, soft braid, maybe with a bow of ribbon near the bottom. I would offer you a paper cup of the Coca Cola I'm enjoying and some of these cookies I bought at the stand. I would like to take hold of your hand, or even both of them, then look intently into your face and ask you a few questions.

Mary, I've read and heard many things that authors (from the evangelists, to theologians, to 20th century writers, both male and female, clerical, religious and lay) have either known or imagined about you, and the life you shared with Jesus and dear Joseph. Far as I know, no one has ever thought about, then written about, how you felt as you were moving toward the end of your life, after Joseph's death and the ascension of Jesus. I can't imagine you fearful of death, dear Mary, but did you ever puzzle about it, as I so often do?

Even if you were not present at Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, you surely heard later about how terrible was the fear of

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Robert F. Campbell

death and suffering that even Jesus felt, because *life*, not death, is what we were made for. Did you, Mary, ever try to envision your own moment of death? As a good neighbor in Nazareth and later in Ephesus, you surely were present at some deathbed experiences of people you knew, whether from illness, age, or accident. There *must* have been some who died suddenly to the shock of their families, and maybe even to you.

Mary, I am still feeling the shock of the recent cardiac arrest and soon-following death of Sister T, four years younger than I am. Because I have had a heart attack and am not succeeding in getting rid of the excess weight the doctors warn me about, I can't help thinking that maybe death by heart attack, or else by cancer, like Daddy, his father and his sister, are what lie ahead for me. I frequently pray that prayer of acceptance of death, and I will not pray against any special form of death, but I do want to be ready.

Dear Mary, as usual, I asked you a question but I really did not wait for an answer. I like to think you had a certain eagerness for death, that it would enable you to see and be with your beloved Son, and dear Joseph once again. In some ways I can relate to that. I dearly loved my big, bossy, blustery, cigar-chomping, but very generous and able Daddy, and I pray he is in heaven, and I'll see him, and other dear ones, when I get there. I want to see your Son, and you, too!

Mary, Mother of Jesus, I end this odd little meditation with these words that I say many times a day:

HOLY MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

PRAY FOR US SINNERS,

NOW

AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH

(whenever, wherever, however it will be) AMEN

Thanks, dear Mary, for listening. □

In Ordinary Time: Healing the Wounds of the Heart, by Roberta C. Bondi, published by Abingdon Press, 1996.

That Roberta Bondi is well-schooled in the ways of the early centuries of the Christian church would be expected from a Professor of Church History but the woman met in these pages is also vulnerable, practical, and wise.

In Ordinary Time is written as six extended letters of spiritual guidance. Lest one fear moralism since Bondi draws heavily from the well of wisdom regarding prayer of the early church mothers and fathers, rest assured, Bondi sifts their ancient words through her hard-lived experience to verify their ability to water the wounds of the modern heart. She says these sages "urged me to write...from my own experience, for, as they tell us, nothing, neither the most wonderful nor the most humiliating thing we are given as Christians is ever given for ourselves alone."

Bondi tells us that "Prayer is sharing ordinary life, with its ordinary silences, distractions, pains, and pleasures, with God." Sometimes prayer takes us back through the pains of childhood that continue to mark us even in later years. Other times wounds from living in our culture with its high expectations are the focus of our prayers. In the chapter "The Yellow Shirt" Bondi recounts the tragic death of a young friend. A phone call from a church friend announces the news: her twenty-six-year-old son has been in a motorcycle accident. As they keep vigil, the family begins to meet their son's many friends--most with highly pierced, tattooed bodies, and all with stories to tell of their son's compassion and his gracious ways of friendship. Here, in a hospital waiting room, a circle is formed from the middle-class family and his "battered-looking friends," and it is these friends who ask that they pray together. It is these friends who knew the son so well, who bring healing to Roberta's heart. This healing is for a hidden wound rooted in scorn for others who look and live differently. In instances like these we learn, "Prayer is such a mysterious business for something so ordinary and everyday."

I recommend this book for those looking for a spiritual friend with whom one can have an honest conversation about prayer. R.L.

An Answer to the Thought of Prayer

Here at Fellowship in Prayer we receive letters commending our work, and we love them! The following letter is reprinted with permission of the author for it expresses the heart of our mission, and of God's for us. This new subscriber stumbled upon us in a bookstore. We didn't know any bookstores or newsstands carried us. We're glad to know they do. If you'd like to introduce us to your local bookstores, let us know. We'll provide extra copies.

The Saturday night before I came across *FiP* journal I had been at a spiritual salon of sorts where Hindus, Buddhists, and Zen Buddhists have been meeting to discuss spiritual concerns, and had brought up the subject of prayer. As several of us grew up in Christian homes, we had something substantial to compare with our daily practice of meditation. I mentioned that while meditation *is* satisfying in many ways, I miss "prayer."

My Hindu friend mentioned a long ago experience on the subway en-route to a celebration for the Hindu mystic, Vivekananda. When a woman selling newspapers for the homeless got on, she felt an immediate impulse to buy her lunch. But then logic intervened, presenting all the reasons why she shouldn't. The woman soon left the subway. My friend had a desire to test God. "If you exist," she said, "make the woman return and I *will* buy her lunch." And that's exactly what happened. My friend has treasured the experience in her heart ever since.

A Buddhist member of our group suggested that prayer sharpens focus and awareness (he is also a graduate student in psychology).

Lenore Baeli Wang teaches writing at Rider University in Lawrenceville, NJ. Her work has appeared in Daughters of Sarah, Orkis *and many other publications. A collection of poetry,* Born in the Year of the Pink Sink, *was published by MalaFemmina Press.*

What you care about is a subject of your deepest thoughts, and thus you are ready to act upon them when the moment comes. To him, this cognitive focus is prayer.

Someone else recalled a similar desire-to-test experience involving a cherry tree and its blossoms-to-be. As a child she'd climb it every day hoping for blossoms. Then she made a deal with God. If blossoms appeared the next day, she'd believe in God. The blossoms did not appear. But she couldn't resist to believe anyway. The experience of seeking in and of itself provided its own satisfaction. Prayer as connection.

My Zen Buddhist friend talked about the increased power and presence felt when meditating in a group as compared with solitary meditation. I recalled the times I prayed with a Christian friend in college. We'd attended a Quaker meeting once and decided to practice silent prayer in our own personal fellowship with each other. These weekly meetings were the strongest moments of "presence" I've ever experienced. Truly, "where two or more are gathered. . ."

Then in the bookstore the other evening, I took a break from perusing a book, *Spiritual Politics*, and strolled over to the magazine stand. There I found your journal, *Fellowship in Prayer*. I thought it was a tract at first, but quickly recognized that it was not by chance I'd stumbled upon it, and expected that it would be much better than a tract. It surely is! My meditating life is ready to be enhanced with prayer. I take my stumbling upon this journal, when the question of and desire for prayer has been rising up in me, to be more than a coincidence, in fact, an answered prayer before I've even begun praying! A simplistic or dogmatic journal would have been re-shelved at the time. But *FiP* spoke to me because of its willingness to examine deeper issues, and its lack of fear in confronting the harder questions. I'm sure such a journal will continue to enter the lives of those on spiritual journeys in a variety of meaningful and surprising ways. □

Prayer Requests . . . . .

Prayers for healing have been requested for the following persons. Please join us in lifting them in prayer.

Kathleen from a brain tumor
Marion for complications of M.S.
5-year-old Katie from heart surgery
Maryann for complete healing from pneumonia
James from cancer
Patrick and Randy from drug addiction
Bernie and Linda for complications from diabetes
Mary and Alex from kidney failure
Rich from Lupus
Annette, Peter, and Jerry from AIDS
Dotty from scleroderma
Percy from colon cancer
Chris from liver cancer
Helen for recovery from an auto accident
Ellie from uterine cancer
Lloyd from prostate cancer

Please also pray for:

Betty for strengthened vision and a calm mind
Alfonse for good health and strong faith

Prayers for healing are offered every Thursday from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Fellowship in Prayer offices located at 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, New Jersey. If you are in the area, come join us.

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We welcome articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience, religious faith or practices, and similar topics. Preference is given to experiential manuscripts. Manuscripts should not exceed 1500 words, should be typed, double spaced, on 8 ½ by 11 inch paper, or on a disk, in WordPerfect and sent to The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542-3227. Please include a brief biography.

We are often asked to share names and addresses with other non-profit spiritual organizations whose work might be of interest to you. If that's not all right with you, please drop us a note and we will withhold your name.

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